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# ME Therapeutics - Discovering and Developing Drugs that Reprogram Immune Cells in Patients to Recognize and Kill Cancer Cells

**Dr. Salim Dhanji**
**CEO/Co-founder**

**ME Therapeutics Holdings Inc.**
**(METX:CSE)**

**Interview conducted by:**
**Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor**
**CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO:** ***Dr. Dhanji, what is the idea behind ME Therapeutics?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** ME Therapeutics is discovering and developing novel drugs that harness the power of the immune system to treat cancer.

**CEOCFO:** ***What is your approach?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** Our approach is to target key immune cells in the tumor microenvironment and reprogram them to overcome immune suppression. This will allow a patient's own immune system to recognize and fight their cancer.

**CEOCFO: What** ***do you understand about looking at this approach, that perhaps others do not? What is the current theory of where this comes into play and what is your idea for how it should come into play?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** My co-founders and I are immunologists by training. I have studied the immune system for over 25 years and have been focused on understanding how the immune system interacts with cancer. This includes how the immune system can play a role in killing cancer as well as how cancer develops ways to hijack the immune system to evade destruction.

Over the last 15 years, there has been a lot of progress made in overcoming the ways cancer suppresses the immune system. We now have drugs that target some of those pathways and can treat patients with cancers that were previously untreatable. There is still a long way to go. The majority of patients remain untreatable with our current immune-based drugs. At ME Therapeutics, we are looking at other ways cancer is suppressing the immune system and how we can overcome those pathways to make drugs available to more patients.

**CEOCFO:** ***ME Therapeutics wants to develop a diverse pipeline of drug candidates. What are you looking at now?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** We are discovering and developing drugs that actually reprogram immune cells inside patients to recognize and kill their cancer cells. These drugs overcome known and scientifically validated pathways that cancers use to suppress the immune system. We are doing this by using targeted delivery of nucleic acid-based technology to deliver genetic messages to a patient's immune cells to change their cells or their tumor microenvironment so it supports an anti-cancer immune response.

**CEOCFO:** ***What happens inside a cell when it is reprogrammed?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** The specialized technology I just mentioned delivers RNA to immune cells. These genetic instructions encode for a protein receptor. When that receptor engages a cancer cell, it leads to the immune cell killing the cancer.

**CEOCFO:** ***Would you tell us about the CD22 binder you have been licensed to use?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** CD22 is a protein expressed in certain cancers. You can program immune cells to directly recognize and kill blood cancer cells with it. We licensed commercial rights for the CD22 binder from the National Research Council of Canada and are applying it to our in vivo CAR program.

**CEOCFO:** ***What are your next steps, and are you funded for what you would like to do?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** We are currently funded for our preclinical phase of development. Next year is all about proof-of-efficacy of our immune reprogramming drugs in mouse cancer models, moving into larger animals, then into clinical studies.

**CEOCFO:** ***When did you realize you were on the right track?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** Over the last several years, we realized that reprogramming immune cells, especially using nucleic acids in vivo, and delivering therapeutic RNAs, which deliver a signal to the tumor microenvironment to shift the balance from a pro-tumor environment to an anti-cancer environment, were both going to become very feasible using RNA technology. The speed in which you can move with this technology, going from an idea to actually having a testable drug, is in the span of weeks rather than years. We are starting to see a lot of excitement with in vivo immune reprogramming.

**"We are unique in how we have approached building the company. We have kept things lean. We are founded by scientists who understand the immune response to cancer. We are really leveraging that to develop our pipeline and be strategic about how we can move forward and create cancer treatments for patients." Dr. Salim Dhanji**

**CEOCFO:** ***What do you understand about how to reach the investment community?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** Not all investors understand the technicalities of what we are doing, but we have a good team and have proven we are able to do what we say we are going to do. That resonates. We also have a great plan going forward in terms of our strategy to move towards the clinic.

**CEOCFO:** ***You recently attended the J.P. Morgan Healthcare Conference. What did you learn in talking with colleagues as well as potential investors that maybe will shape what you are doing going forward?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** I heard from a lot of people first-hand that you saw excitement creep back into people's faces at the conference. Overall, I think it is going to be important for us to move our programs into the clinic as quickly as possible because that is where you get attention from institutional investors. We recognize that. We are a younger company. We are lean, we move quickly, and we have been able to accomplish what we said we were going to accomplish. Most importantly, we have a great program that we believe we can move forward into the clinic.

**CEOCFO:** ***What else should people know about ME Therapeutics?***
**Dr. Dhanji:** We are unique in how we have approached building the company. We have kept things lean. We are founded by scientists who understand the immune response to cancer. We are really leveraging that to develop our pipeline and be strategic about how we can move forward and create cancer treatments for patients.